



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
ISLAND LAKE
FISHING ACCESS SITE
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT
Environmental Assessment**

August 11, 2014

Description of the Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing site improvements at Island Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS). FWP proposes to improve Island Lake FAS with an improved gravel access road, a designated parking area to accommodate six to eight vehicles with trailers, gravel boat ramp, four designated campsites, a concrete vault latrine, fencing, fire rings, and informational and directional signs. Camping would be allowed at the FAS in the designated sites only. A nightly camping fee of \$7 would be charged as per the FAS Biennial Fee Rule that was adopted by the FWP Commission in 2013.

The FWP-owned 37.7-acre site on Island Lake provides the only public access to the lake and has been a popular destination for fishing, camping, and other recreational activities since its acquisition in 2000. Existing facilities at the FAS include an unimproved access road that crosses neighboring private land and land owned by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, a pioneered boat launch, a pioneered parking area, and a pioneered camping area. The existing access road crosses private and state-owned property, and the new road would be rerouted to stay on FWP property. There is currently a problem with people from the access trespassing on private property, and FWP would provide signage, fencing, and barrier rocks to prevent trespass.

Public Comment:

FWP accepted public comment on the draft environmental assessment (EA) for a 30-day period, from April 11, 2014, through May 11, 2014. The EA was advertised through media releases and legal notices in the Daily Inter Lake, Helena Independent Record, The Western News, Char-Koosta News, and on the FWP web page. Copies of the EA were available from the Kalispell FWP office, on the FWP web site, at the Montana State Library, and available for viewing at the Flathead County Libraries.

Thirteen written comments were received during the comment period, with ten comments in favor of the proposal and two in opposition to the proposal. One comment was neither in favor or

opposed. Many of the comments in favor of the proposal expressed general support of the proposal, but identified concerns and suggestions regarding specific components of the proposal. We have identified the unique comments, paraphrased them below, and provided a brief response to each comment.

Response to Comments:

1. **Comment** - Three parties who own land bordering or nearby the site commented that they currently have or anticipate having a problem with trespass onto their land from the FAS. They suggested fencing, barrier rocks, and signage to help prevent such trespass. One neighbor expressed concern that the plan does not call for a fence along the eastern boundary of the FAS and that illegal trespassing would occur by campers looking for firewood.

Response - FWP will provide barrier rocks, fencing, and signage of the property boundary to help prevent trespass onto adjacent property. The development would include a fence along the eastern boundary of the FAS and signs to mark the property boundary. Additionally, FWP would install signage that directs people to the property, which does not exist now. Many visitors unknowingly trespass on adjacent property simply because they do not know where the FAS is located.

2. **Comment** - On page 6 the EA incorrectly states that neighboring private property is open for public use, this is not true.

Response - FWP apologizes for this mistake and recognizes that this private land is not open for public use. There are currently no signs that identify the site as FWP property or define the property boundary. FWP hopes that new signage will lead to a decrease in trespass on adjacent lands. Also, see the previous response.

3. **Comment** - Three parties suggested that four campsites are not enough to accommodate everyone who wants to camp there, especially on the busy weekend. Two of those parties suggested an overflow camping area because people who make the long drive to the lake to camp will not turn around because the designated sites are full. Some people report having seen as many as fifteen camp trailers or RVs at the site at one time. One person suggested planning the development so that additional campsites could be added in the future.

Response - In the site layout for the proposal, FWP has attempted to maximize the number of campsites, while minimizing the disturbance to previously undisturbed areas. Space is limited in the desirable camping areas on the lakeshore. FWP is seeking an acceptable compromise between resource protection and providing recreational opportunities. FWP would look into the possibility of making one of the campsites a group site to accommodate larger groups. FWP would also consider expanding camping opportunities in the future as needed.

4. **Comment** - Garbage and waste will be generated by visitors, and FWP should have a plan to deal with it.

Response - FWP would provide a concrete vault latrine on-site to deal with human waste and would provide routine litter pick-up. Littering and dumping is prohibited by regulation, and that regulation would be enforced.

5. **Comment** - Three people commented that the improvements are much needed, and one person said that they are long overdue. Another person supports spending tax dollars on projects that improve recreational opportunities in the area.

Response - Thank you for the comments.

6. **Comment** - The plan does not address the increased fire hazard as a result of the increased use and new campsites in areas that have fuels on the ground. FWP should clear a safe area around the campsites to reduce the potential for spread of fire.

Response - FWP would design the campsites to minimize the risk of fires getting out of control. Fires would be allowed only in provided steel fire rings, and the ground surrounding those rings would be cleared of vegetation.

7. **Comment** - Three people commented that the improvement of the boat ramp would open the lake up to larger boats. They expressed concerns about the impacts of the larger boats, including noise, erosion, water quality issues, disturbance to fish and wildlife, and the loss of the peaceful atmosphere on the lake. Some of those people suggested a nonmotorized regulation, a no-wake regulation, or limiting boat motors to 10HP or less on the lake.

Response - FWP does not anticipate a large increase in the number or size of boats using Island Lake. FWP would install an improved gravel boat ramp, but the launch will remain shallow and difficult for large boats. The road to the site will remain long and rough, and should prevent people from towing larger boats to the site. Placing a limit on the size of boat motors is a possibility, but would have to be adopted through the FWP Commission rule-making process in a separate effort.

8. **Comment** - The development will stand out from the generally primitive surroundings in the area.

Response - FWP designs its fishing access sites to blend in with the natural surroundings as much as possible. This includes using locally sourced fill materials and gravel, natural color schemes, and landscape design that compliments the natural surroundings.

9. **Comment** - FWP should swap the locations of the day-use area and ramp with the camping area to alleviate problems with campers disturbing the nearby residents, to prevent day-users from having to drive through the camp area, and to minimize fire hazard by placing the camping area farther away from the forested area to the south.

Response - FWP agrees with this suggestion and will switch the locations of the camping area and day-use area in the final design for the reasons outlined in the comment.

10. **Comment** - The Forest Service supports well-managed recreation, and this site has a lot of opportunity.

Response - Thank you for the comment.

11. **Comment** - Currently, people access the lake by trespassing on private property, and this site development will help alleviate this problem.

Response - Thank you for the comment. FWP agrees; please see Nos. 1 and 2.

12. **Comment** - Wardens need to make more of an attempt to patrol Island Lake; fish poaching is a problem there.

Response - FWP game wardens occasionally patrol the area and would continue to do so. There would also be an increased presence by FAS maintenance personnel and management, which would also be a deterrent to illegal activity including poaching.

13. **Comment** - The construction of the boat ramp will require a storm water permit and a 318 permit.

Response - FWP would obtain all of the necessary permits prior to starting construction; however, as currently designed, construction impacts stop at the edge of water.

14. **Comment** - Why would the FAS be limited to archery and shotgun hunting? Rifles could safely be used for hunting south of area that is proposed for development. Neighboring state and private lands do not have a restriction on rifle hunting. Does FWP have the authority to make that decision?

Response - ARM 12.8.202 allows FWP to designate weapons restrictions in recreation areas when there is a hazard to human life or property. FWP would continue to investigate whether rifles could be safely used for hunting at the site.

15. **Comment** - The site should be day-use only to protect the pristine nature of Island Lake, unless FWP can provide an on-site host. Gunfire and partying are currently a problem there, and the proposed improvements would only make the problem worse. Wildlife would be negatively affected by the overnight use.

Response - FWP hopes that the development will actually alleviate some of the problems that are currently occurring there, including gunfire, loud parties, garbage, and over-crowding. Regulations would be posted on-site, and FWP staff would be visiting the area on a more regular basis. Shooting would be allowed for lawful hunting purposes only. FWP would like to eventually have a host on-site during the summer months, but that would require electricity, phone, and a well, which are not funded at this time.

16. **Comment** - Grizzly bears were not mentioned in the EA. I have heard through a number of sources that grizzly bears have been seen around the lake.

Response - FWP acknowledges that grizzly bears may use the area, but does not anticipate that the proposed development would result in a significant disturbance to the species. Because recreation has been occurring at the site for years, grizzly bears are likely accustomed to human activity at the site.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI):

Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment (EA), I find Alternative B to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Alternative B: Proposed Action:

In order to provide improved recreational opportunities, reduce resource degradation, and address private property trespass issues, FWP proposes to develop Island Lake FAS with a developed gravel access road, a designated parking area to accommodate six to eight vehicles with trailers, a gravel boat ramp, four designated campsites, a concrete vault latrine, fencing, fire rings, and informational and directional signs.

The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to:

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Alan Wood for

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Regional Supervisor

August 11, 2014

Date